

#GoOpen: OER for K-12 Educators

Frequently Asked Questions

What are Open Educational Resources (OER)?

Open educational resources (OER) are teaching, learning, and research resources that reside in the public domain or have been released under an intellectual property license that permits their free use and re-purposing by others. OER include full courses, course materials, modules, textbooks, streaming videos, tests, software, and any other tools, materials, or techniques used to support access to knowledge.

How does OER help educators and students?

Open educational resources give educators the ability to adapt instructional resources to the individual needs of their students, to ensure that resources are up-to-date, and to ensure that cost is not a barrier to accessing high-quality standards-aligned resources.

What is the difference between ‘free’ and ‘open’ resources?

Open educational resources are and always will be free, but not all free resources are OER. Free resources may be temporarily free or may be restricted from use at some time in the future (including by the addition of fees to access those resources). Moreover, free resources may not be modified, adapted or redistributed without express permissions from the copyright holder.

Are all OER digital?

Like most educational resources these days, most OER are “born” digital. But like traditional resources, they can be made available to students in both digital and printed formats. Of course, digital OER are easier to share, modify, and redistribute, but being digital is not what makes something an OER or not.

How do I know if an educational resource is an OER?

The key distinguishing characteristic of OER is its intellectual property license and the freedoms the license grants to others to share and adapt it. If a lesson plan or activity is not clearly tagged or marked as being in the public domain or having an open license, it is not OER. It's that simple. Creative Commons copyright licenses are standardized, free-to-use open licenses that facilitate the development and use of OER and are recommended for use by all K-12 educators.

What are best practices for hosting OER in online or digital platforms?

Schools are increasingly relying on customized learning management systems (LMS) and/or online lesson plan sharing services and sites to manage their digital instructional resources. These tools offer an easy way to find and vet educational resources aligned to standards and to share them with students. Digital platforms used to help create and share OER should make it easy for educators to:

- Easily and clearly attach an open license to their lesson plan or instructional resource;
- Be able to search for lesson plans and other resources and filter results by license type; and,
- Be able to download the OER hosted on the platform (in editable versions when available).

This living document was prepared by Doug Levin (EdTech Strategies), with input from Nicole Allen (SPARC), Layla Bonnot (CCSSO), Cable Green (Creative Commons), Meredith Jacob (Creative Commons-U.S.), and Lisa Petrides (ISKME). Please help refine it by contributing your questions, suggested edits, and feedback at:

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